

Nanny of the Maroons

Nanny was one of countless anonymous women who resisted enslavement, whilst holding on to their African culture and spiritual beliefs. Much of what is known about her comes from Maroon oral accounts, passed down from generation to generation. Apart from a few references, little written evidence and few images directly related to Nanny's life have survived. Her story has been reconstructed here from these oral accounts.

This trail uses the story of **Nanny of the Maroons** to introduce you to the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As you follow the trail, you will be invited to

- visit our galleries and online collections explorer to see objects that will help bring Nanny's story to life
- weigh up some of the decisions that Nanny might have faced on her journey into slavery and then to freedom
- answer some questions to test your general knowledge

This trail has been written for visitors to the National Maritime Museum by Stella Dadzie. Stella is a British black feminist historian and education activist, best known for her co-authorship of *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. Her latest book *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery & Resistance* was published in 2020 and explores how enslaved women 'kicked back' against enslavement. The image of Nanny is a composition by the artist, Karen McLean based on the statue of Nanny in Jamaica's national hero park. Nanny is seen holding an abeng, an animal horn used by the Maroons to communicate information.



How much do you know about the Transatlantic Slave Trade?
Circle your answers...

1.

How many Africans are believed to have been captured and taken to the Americas from the 1500s to the 1800s?

a. at least 2 million

b. at least 7 million

c. at least 10 million
2.

How many of these captives would have been women?

a. 1 in 3

b. 1 in 10

c. 1 in 50
3.

How long was a typical voyage from West Africa to the Americas?

a. 1.5 months

b. 4.5 months

c. 12 months
4.

What percentage of African captives are believed to have died en route?

a. 15%

b. 25%

c. 50%
5.

How many African captives were shipped to Jamaica?

a. Fifty thousand

b. One hundred thousand

c. Six hundred thousand
6.

How many calories did the average daily diet of enslaved people contain?

a. 500 calories

b. 1000 calories

c. 3000 calories
7.

How often did slave rebellions occur on the island of Jamaica?

a. one every 10 years

b. one every 50 years

c. one every 100 years
8.

Where in the West Indies did 'Bussa's rebellion' take place?

a. Jamaica

b. Barbados

c. Haiti
9.

Which of these women campaigned to abolish the transatlantic slave trade?

a. Hannah Murray

b. Hannah More

c. Hannah Montana
10.

What year did Britain finally abolish transatlantic the slave trade?

a. 1834

b. 1825

c. 1807

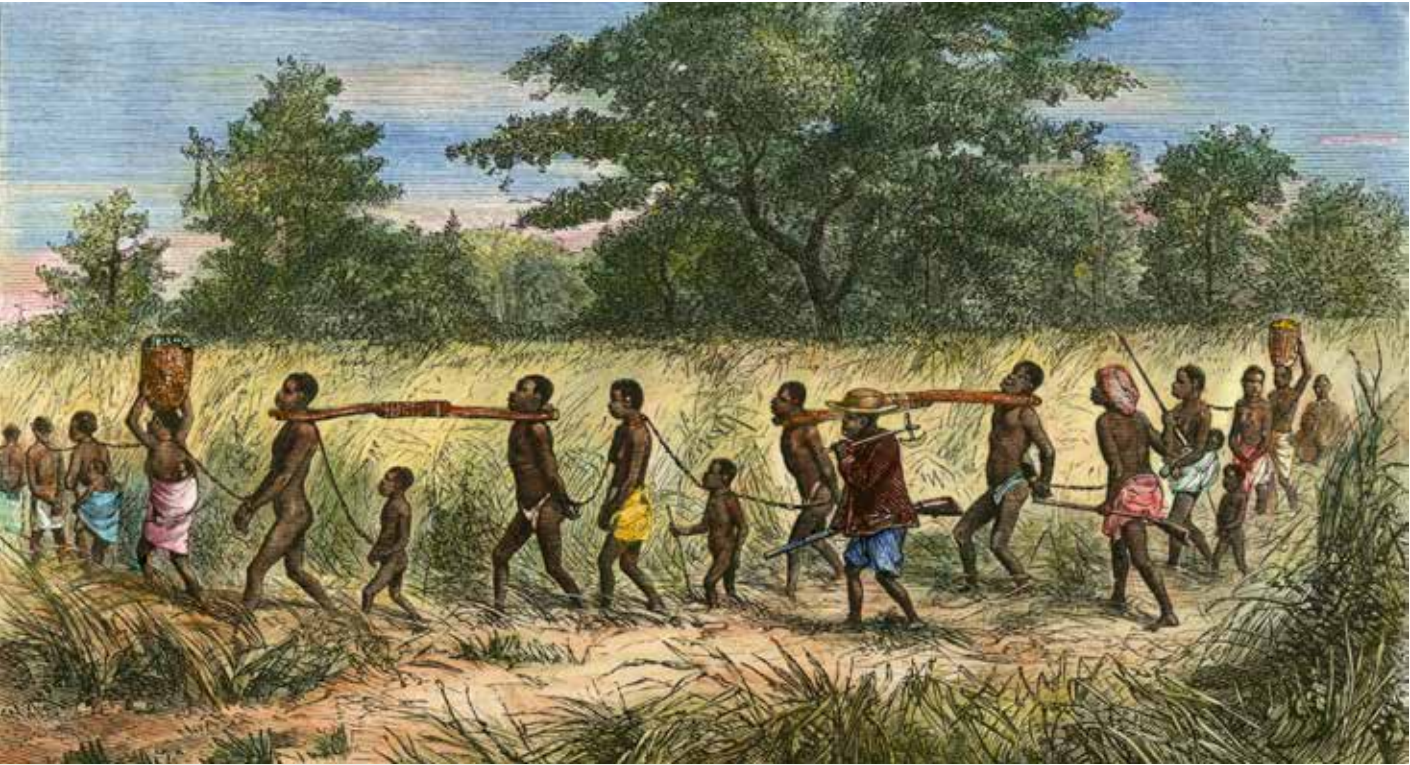
Nanny of the Maroons
1686 – around 1760

'...six members of an Ashanti family, consisting of five brothers, Cudjoe, Accompong, Johnny, Cuffee and Quaco, and one sister, Nanny, made their escape from slavery and assumed leadership of the Maroons.'

(Joseph J. Williams, *The Maroons of Jamaica*, Boston College Press, 1938)

Nanny was probably just an ordinary girl, growing up in a typical Ashanti village in West Africa. Named after her grandmother, she lived with her parents and five brothers. One day, as Nanny was walking home from a trip to collect water from a nearby river, she heard shouts and terrified cries coming from the direction of her village.

Dragged from her hiding place, she was made to stand with her brothers and the others from her village who had not managed to flee. Chained together by their necks, they were forced to walk for weeks by their captors until they reached the coast. There they were sold to some strange-looking men.



This coloured engraving from the 1800s shows African captives yoked in pairs and forced to march from the interior to the coastal markets by African slave traders (Granger Historical Picture Archive).

It is unlikely Nanny had ever seen anyone with white skin before. At first, she thought the men who had bought them were ghosts. Together with her brothers, she was taken to a large fortress on the coast and thrown into a crowded, foul-smelling dungeon to await her fate.



This photograph shows the female holding dungeon at Elmina Castle in modern day Ghana, formerly known as the Gold Coast. The stains on the walls hint at the vile conditions in which African captives were held before being shipped to the Americas.

If you were Nanny, what would you do?

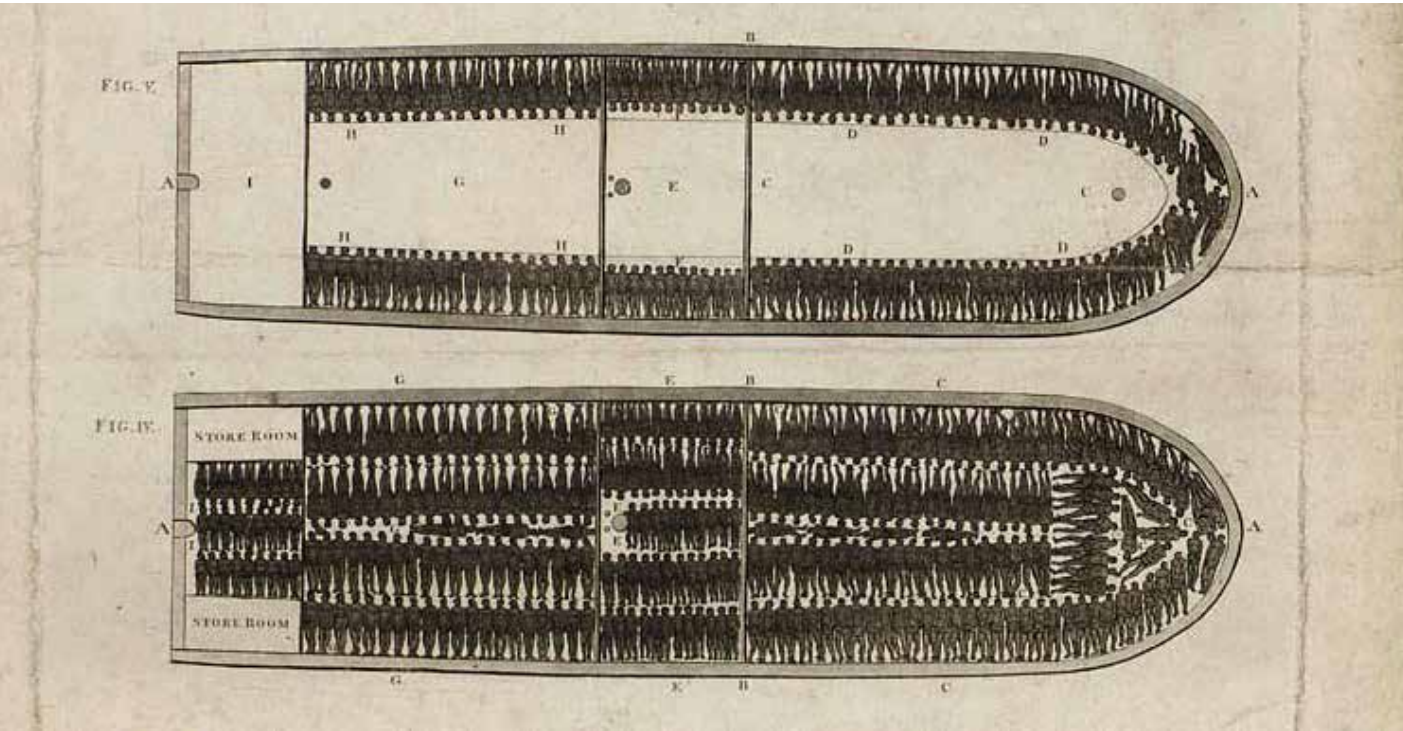
Try to escape	Plan a rebellion	Accept her fate
This means almost certain recapture, possibly with deadly consequences.	This means finding others who speak her language and are willing to risk their lives without any weapons.	This means putting up with her terrifying situation – at least for now.

What does Nanny decide to do?

Nanny chooses to accept her fate and bide her time, hoping for a better opportunity to escape or rebel in the future.

Portuguese, British, French, Dutch, Spanish and Danish traders bought enslaved people from the West African coast and shipped them to the Americas. They came armed with guns, chains, whips, handcuffs and leg-irons to prevent escape or resistance. To resist meant facing brutal punishments or death. To find her way home without being recaptured would have been almost impossible.

Nanny was loaded onto a slave ship along with hundreds of other captives. The men were forced below deck, where they were packed so close together they could barely breathe. Sometimes, the women and children, thought to be less of a threat, were left to roam the ship. Anchored off-shore, the ship prepared to set sail.



This 1789 plan of the infamous Liverpool slave ship *Brooks* shows the way its 'cargo' of 490 captive Africans was transported across the Atlantic Ocean. The practice was known as 'tight-packing' (ZBA2745).

If you were Nanny, what would you do?

Jump overboard and try to swim for land	Find out where the sailors keep their weapons and seize them	Focus on surviving the voyage
The currents are strong and the sea is full of sharks. She could drown or get eaten.	Rebellion only succeeds with the support of other captives, many of whom are already too weak to stand.	This means a horrific journey across the ocean involving brutal treatment and the risk of dying from disease or other dangers.

What does Nanny decide to do?

After her long trek to the coast and the weeks spent languishing in the barracoons (enclosures for holding captives), Nanny feels weak and unwell. Although she longs to regain her freedom, she decides to wait until she feels strong enough to fight back.

Although around one in ten slave ships recorded some form of slave uprising, the chances of success were slim, particularly once the ship had set sail. Their captors were notoriously cruel and any hint of rebellion was ruthlessly suppressed.



Nanny arrived in Jamaica, where she and her brothers were sold as slaves. They were forced to work on a large sugar plantation from sunup to sun-down. Despite the poor diet and dreadful conditions, anyone who refused to work was severely punished. Back in Britain, more and more people were opposed to the slave trade, but the Abolitionist cause would only begin to gain power and influence towards the end of the 1700s.

This 1806 engraving shows a group of enslaved women and men on the way to auction (ZBA2565).



This photograph, taken around 1880, shows a group of female cane-cutters on a Jamaican plantation (ZBA2612).

Nanny and her five brothers Cudjoe, Accompong, Johnny, Cuffee and Quaco join other runaways and the original inhabitants of the island to live as free people. They fight off every attempt to recapture them. Nanny gains a reputation for her spiritual powers and her military skills. To ensure their survival, they often have to make tough decisions.

If you were Nanny, what would you do?

Plot her escape and run for the hills	Take part in a rebellion and burn down the cane fields	Accept her fate and try to make the best of it
Escapees face torture, amputation or death if caught.	Rebellion involves careful plotting. If betrayed, those involved risk torture and execution.	This means risking an early death either from disease, punishment or sheer exhaustion.

What does Nanny decide to do?

Nanny plots her escape with her brothers. They head for the Blue Mountains, where they live as outlaws, otherwise known as 'Maroons'. She is chosen to be their leader. They stay well-hidden and turn their mountain stronghold into a well-defended sanctuary.

The inaccessible terrain of the Blue Mountains, with their dense vegetation, provided Maroons with an ideal place to hide and set up home. Despite numerous attempts by the British to destroy or re-enslave them, they were never defeated whilst under Nanny's leadership.

If you were Nanny, what would you do?

Raid a plantation for food and supplies	Eat whatever they can hunt or forage	Rear their own animals and crops
Leaving their mountain strongholds risks capture or execution.	Food can be hunted or foraged but with so many hungry mouths to feed, it is a full-time job.	To grow crops or rear animals involves guarding them closely and abandoning them if forced to flee.

What does Nanny decide to do?

Each option involves risks and benefits, so the Maroons rely on all three. Raiding plantations often brings them weapons, utensils or new recruits. Hunting and foraging enables them to exploit and gain intimate knowledge of the surrounding territory. Growing crops means they can plan ahead, and exchange any surplus for knives, cloth and others essentials.

To survive in such hostile terrain was a daily struggle. Despite this, the Maroons managed to rear their own animals, grow their own food and hunt or forage when needed. They also raided nearby plantations for food and new recruits. Nanny is believed to have freed over 1,000 enslaved people over a period of thirty years.

Nanny and her followers were offered a peace treaty. In return for helping the British to catch other runaways, they were finally given the chance to live in freedom, on their own land.

If you were Nanny, what would you do?

Continue fighting	Accept the terms of the treaty	Give themselves up
To carry on fighting means a lifetime of being hunted like animals.	This meant trusting their enemy to honour the treaty – and helping them capture other runaways.	To many Maroons, surrender was unthinkable. Their freedom was seen as too precious to be given away.

What does Nanny decide to do?

Nanny and her fellow Maroons decide to agree to the treaty. Signed on 20th April 1740, she and her followers were granted 500 acres of land. The village built on this land was known as New Nanny Town (later re-named Moore Town) and survives to this day.



Faced with the Maroons' formidable skills as guerrilla fighters and years of fierce resistance, the British had no choice but to sue for peace. By signing treaties with the Maroons, they not only made a truce with a troublesome foe but also enlisted their former enemy in capturing runaway slaves.

This engraving by Agostino Brunias is thought to show the signing of a similar treaty in St Vincent in 1773 (ZBA2521).

The Windward maroons, led by Nanny, signed a peace treaty on 20th April 1740, granting them the right to self-government and their own land. The Maroons agreed not to harbour runaways and to help catch them in return for bounties. They were also expected to fight for the British in the event of an attack from the French or Spanish, both of whom had designs on Britain's West Indian territories.

The peace treaty

'...granted Nanny and the people now residing with her and their heirs ... a certain parcel of Land containing five hundred acres in the parish of Portland...'



In Jamaica, the Maroons continue to celebrate the event to this day. Nanny is considered a national heroine, and her image appears on the Jamaican \$500 dollar note.

Nanny's resistance to enslavement is just one example of the different ways women found to undermine slavery.

Follow the trail...

1

To begin your tour, make your way to the Great Map. Can you find the country from which Nanny was taken?

2

To find out whether you were right, head for the Tudors & Stuart Seafarers gallery and click on the slavery option on the middle table

3

Make your way to the Sea Things gallery.

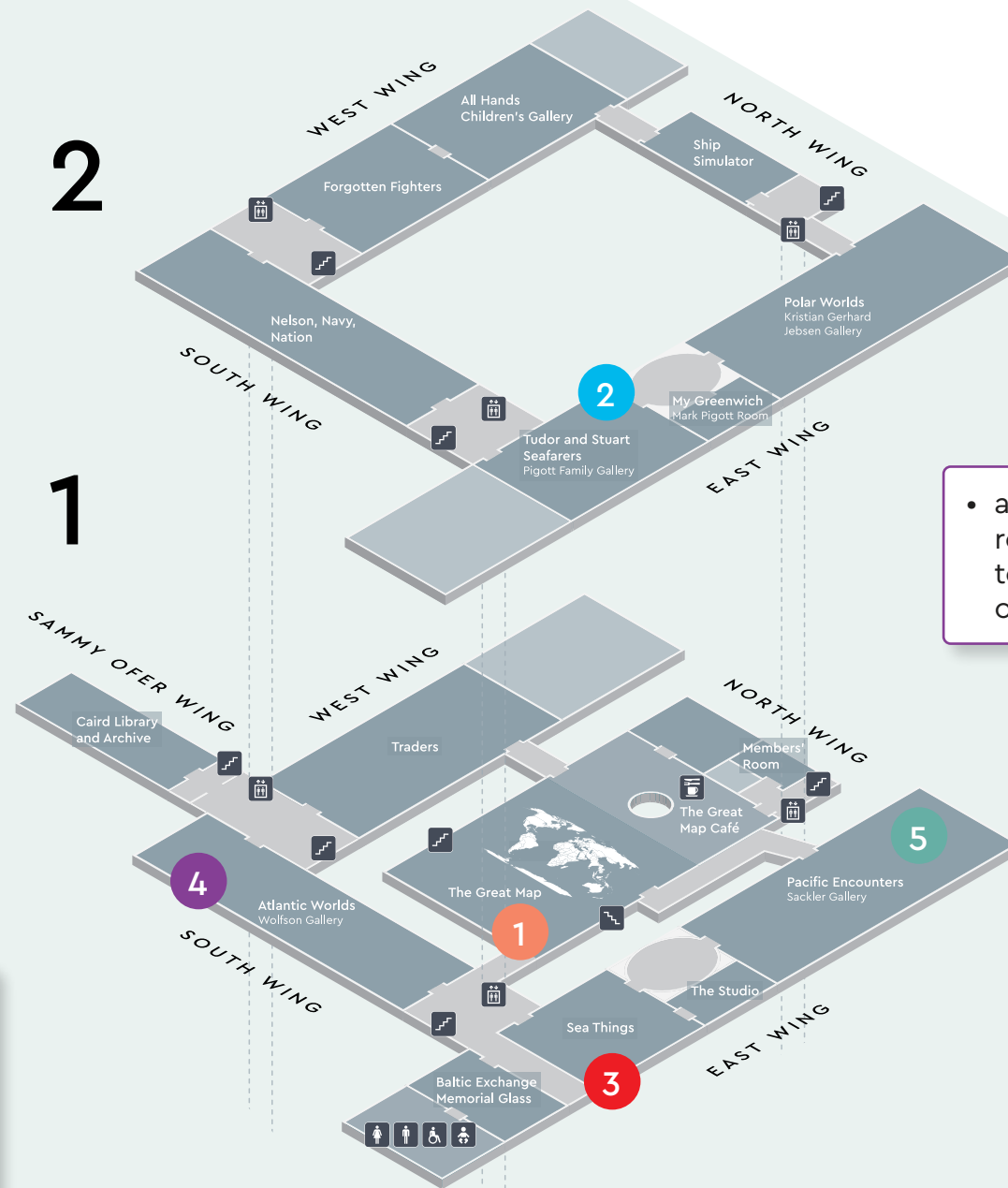
Can you find the interactive screen that describes the currencies of the slave trade, such as the manilla?



Map

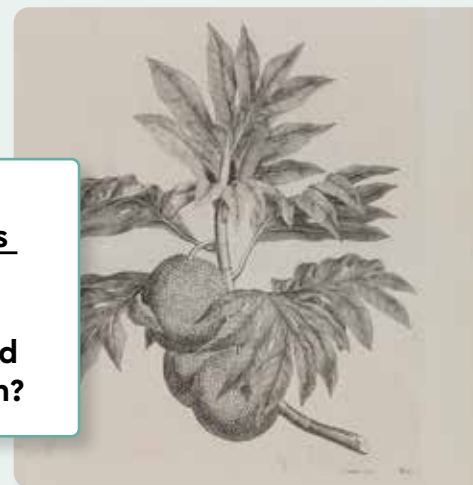
2

1



5

Finally, make your way to the Pacific Encounters gallery. Can you find the image of a breadfruit, one of the foods enslaved people would have eaten?

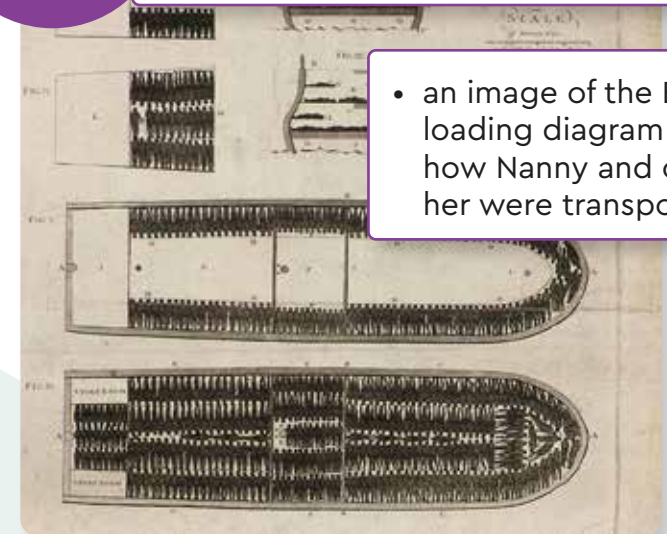


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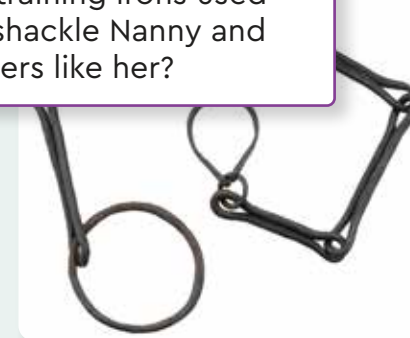
Now make your way to the Atlantic Worlds gallery.

Find two or more of the following...

- an image of the Brooks' loading diagram showing how Nanny and others like her were transported?



- an example of the restraining irons used to shackle Nanny and others like her?



- an image of a Maroon encampment, showing how Nanny might have lived



- a portrait of the abolitionist Hannah More



- a painting of a slave ship?



Want to find out more?

You can find out more about Nanny of the Maroons by clicking on this QR code



You will also find more information here about Hannah More, Bussa's Rebellion and Slavery & the Slave Trade in general

RMG's online collections explorer enables you to view thousands of objects online and, if they have been digitized, download images of them for free. Go to our website, click on 'Collections' and enter the object's unique reference number (e.g. ZBA2612) into the search engine:

collections.rmg.co.uk/collections.html

The Caird Library & Archives contains a large collection of books and documents relating to the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The Prince Phillip Maritime Collection Centre in Kidbrooke is where we store objects that are not currently on display in the museum's galleries. Use our website to book a tour or arrange to view a specific object.

For other enquiries, email RMGenquiries@rmg.co.uk

This trail is in development and will evolve into a digital trail shortly. If you have any feedback for us, please email learning@rmg.co.uk

